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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Security Council
Sixty-ninth year

Identical letters dated 28 April 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I wish to draw your attention to the following information:

I write to transmit our comments on the second report of the Secretary-General concerning implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014) on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/2014/295).

First, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has shown a keen focus on meeting the humanitarian needs resulting from the crisis in Syria. It has devoted most of its resources to meeting the basic needs of its citizens, and has cooperated with United Nations humanitarian agencies and other international organizations in pursuit of that goal. The Syrian Government has continued to fulfil its duty towards its citizens. It has assisted the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies in fulfilling their mandate under the humanitarian response plan for 2014, which was agreed in consultation with them. The Government's cooperation with international organizations has borne fruit. It has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all affected citizens without distinction based on respect for the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and the guidelines regulating the emergency assistance of the United Nations as set forth in General Assembly resolution 46/182, particularly the principles of national sovereignty, the role of the State in delivering humanitarian aid within its territory, neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization of humanitarian work.

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Second, the correct response to the humanitarian situation should include not only the provision and delivery of relief, but also action to address the causes of the growing human suffering in numerous areas. Foremost among those causes are terrorism, which must be confronted, and the unilateral coercive measures illegally imposed on Syria by certain States.

Significantly, the report of the Secretary-General ignores the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the livelihoods of Syrian civilians; those are measures that have exacerbated human suffering. Yet there is an international consensus, which is reflected in the relevant General Assembly resolutions, regarding the legal and ethical repercussions of such sanctions and their negative humanitarian effect.

The report also ignores the connection made in Security Council resolution 2139 (2014) between the humanitarian situation in Syria and the need to combat terrorism. That situation raises further questions regarding the extent to which the United Nations Secretariat has adopted a politicized approach in addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria. Terrorism has damaged the country's infrastructure, State institutions and living conditions. Failure to note that reality contravenes the Security Council resolution and constitutes an unacceptable approach. Moreover, the United Nations team that recently visited Aleppo governorate was able to see for itself the extent of the damage wrought by the armed terrorist groups, which had cut off water and electricity from Aleppo city in an act of reprisal against more than 3 million inhabitants. The team witnessed the harm done to the inhabitants when the terrorists closed the road to Aleppo city, which supplies the governorate with all of its basic necessities. Residential areas of the city have been hit by dozens of missiles; 80 landed in a single day, on 17 April 2014. Some 600 civilians were killed or wounded and hospitalized.

Third, the report ignores the acts of terrorism that have targeted Syria's State institutions and civilian population, affecting the living conditions of Syrian civilians. Drawing on biased reports and incorrect information, it once again levels untrue accusations against the Syrian Government. In so doing, it violates the principles of neutrality and transparency. It also overlooks the facts noted every day by the United Nations country team. Surprisingly, it describes as unverified certain violations that occurred in full view of the United Nations, such as the killings, abductions and rapes that have taken place in many regions of Syria, while at the same time relying on open sources and misinformation to make accusations against the Syrian Government. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that it is exercising its constitutional duty by protecting its citizens from the continual threat posed to their lives by terrorist crimes, including bombings and daily indiscriminate missile attacks on homes, workplaces and educational, medical and religious institutions in many governorates. On numerous occasions, the Syrian Government has informed the Secretary-General and the Security Council of specific terrorist acts against its citizens. It has provided detailed and verified information regarding the terrorists, who have come from over 80 countries to commit terrorist crimes inside Syria with support and assistance from certain neighbouring States, as well as States of the region and beyond. Yet the reports of the United Nations still fail to comply with the counter-terrorism resolutions of the Security Council by addressing those incidents and their impact on the lives and humanitarian conditions of Syrians.

Fourth, the report of the Secretary-General relies on what it calls open sources. That approach goes against the spirit of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), which requires that the Secretary-General should base his reports on specific facts on the ground, and not on the views and agendas of non-governmental organizations and groups. The reference to open sources is also inconsistent with the report's omission of certain other incidents that were verified by the United Nations. One example is the terrorist missile attack of 15 April 2014 on the Manar School in Damascus, in which two pupils were killed and 60 were wounded by shrapnel. The report fails to mention the recruitment of children by armed terrorist groups, which has been verified by the United Nations. During its visit to Aleppo city, the United Nations team encountered those groups and met with their leaders in the Eye Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in Aleppo city, which the groups are using as a military camp.

Fifth, the drafters of the report make inflated claims regarding certain locations, which the report describes as hard-to-reach areas. However, they omit the genuine reasons why many of those areas are hard to reach. This raises questions regarding the criteria that were adopted in order to select such fabricated data, and the true purposes of that data. In particular, it is puzzling that the report accuses the Syrian Government of failing to cooperate sufficiently with the United Nations in order to arrange access to those areas. The United Nations requested field visits to only four of the areas, and the Syrian Government approved all of those requests. Yet the report continues to raise the problem of access to the areas. It downplays the extent and scale of the Syrian Government's cooperation, and ignores the armed groups' responsibility for the situation. On the basis of that approach, which fails to give a true and accurate account of the facts, the report requests the Security Council to take further action.

Sixth, in its account of the situation in Syria, the report contains exaggerations and unacceptable insinuations of a political nature. For instance, it uses sectarian terms to describe the components of the Syrian people (paragraph 9), and refers to the terrorist groups, the bulk of the members of which are foreign, as the "armed opposition". In paragraph 6, it describes an attack on the town of Kassab as having been launched by "armed opposition groups" including the Nusrah Front, Ahrar al-Sham and Ansar al-Sham. The use of that political epithet to refer to the Nusrah Front, which took part in the attack, goes against the decision of the Security Council to include the group on its list of terrorist entities associated with Al-Qaida. In the same way, the report ignores the direct involvement of Turkey, which supported and provided direct covering fire for the terrorist groups' attack on the town of Kassab, in the Ladhiqiyah countryside.

Seventh, in paragraph 34, the report recognizes that the Syrian Government has facilitated the entry of relief and humanitarian aid across the official and legal border crossings with neighbouring States. Yet, in paragraph 35, it requests the Syrian Government to allow the use of illegal border crossings controlled by armed terrorist groups. That approach is unacceptable. The United Nations Secretariat should abandon it as inconsistent with the provisions of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), which affirms the need to respect Syrian sovereignty. Similarly, the report seeks to confer legitimacy on aid delivered illegally via crossings controlled by armed terrorist groups, describing such operations as easy and feasible without difficulty. The Syrian Government requests that future reports desist from such dubious and unacceptable methods.

Eighth, funding continues to pose a genuine obstacle to United Nations humanitarian agencies as they work to provide and deliver humanitarian aid. Certain States are blocking funding for United Nations humanitarian programmes in Syria, while at the same time competing with one another to accuse Syria of failing to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. According to the United Nations, donor States have provided no more than 19 per cent of the amount requested by the United Nations to fund the humanitarian response plan for 2014. Unfortunately, the reports of the United Nations continue to lay the blame on the Syrian Government, instead of highlighting the lack of continuous and predictable funding for humanitarian assistance, not to mention the waste caused by poor coordination between agencies in fulfilling their mandates.

Syria has cooperated with the United Nations to provide and deliver humanitarian assistance. It is committed to meeting the needs of its citizens in view of the terrorist onslaught against the country. However, the report of the Secretary-General ignores Syria's efforts, choosing instead to gloss over them and hold the Syrian Government responsible for all of the gaps in humanitarian work in the country. It disregards the ways in which terrorism and unilateral coercive measures have given rise to growing humanitarian needs. It omits the failure of the United Nations itself to fulfil its role effectively, whether because of poor coordination or lack of funding. Syria rejects the politicized approach reflected in the request that the Security Council should take further action against it. Syria calls on the Council to respond to the humanitarian situation without politicization, in accordance with the guidelines regulating the emergency assistance of the United Nations, particularly the principles of respect for national sovereignty, neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization of humanitarian work.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 70 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Permanent Representative of the
Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations

Annex to the identical letters dated 28 April 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Observations of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014)

First: Measures taken by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has recently adopted a series of measures, including administrative measures, that have enabled the United Nations to facilitate its humanitarian response operations and increase their scope. Those measures include, inter alia:

1. The Government informed the United Nations that it had adopted new procedures to facilitate the movement of humanitarian convoys. Under those procedures, a representative of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the competent authorities at the warehouses supervise the process of verifying and inspecting items and the loading thereof. After this process is completed, the trucks are duly stamped and sealed, and a form indicating that the cargo has been inspected is signed. This new procedure will facilitate the passage of convoys at military checkpoints.

2. In order to address the concerns raised in Security Council resolution 2139 (2014) regarding medical assistance, the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization agreed on the contents of a consolidated medical package that the United Nations can include in humanitarian aid convoys. On 10 April 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the office of the Resident Coordinator with the list of medicines and medical supplies that were agreed upon.

3. The Syrian Government facilitated the delivery of vaccines to all regions of Syria as part of the national vaccination campaign. The fifth child polio campaign was carried out from 6 to 10 April 2014. It should be noted that some 2.9 million children were immunized in the fourth campaign, which was carried out in March 2014.

4. Since the crisis began, the Syrian Government has issued more than 400 entry visas to United Nations officials. To date, only a small number of requests are still being considered. In that connection, it should be noted that the procedure for granting visas applies only to United Nations officials who hold a United Nations laissez-passer. It does not apply to apply to other agencies, and whose officials do not hold such documents.

Second: Distribution of humanitarian aid

The Syrian Government has continued its efforts to facilitate passage to all areas, including hard-to-reach locations. In that connection, we should like to stress that the United Nations must distribute humanitarian assistance directly. This matter should not be left in the hands of armed terrorist groups. United Nations assistance was delivered to the following areas:

(a) On 29 March 2014, the United Nations delivered humanitarian assistance to Duma. This was the second visit to that area in the period from 20 to 30 March

2014. On 24 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates informed office of the Resident Coordinator that the Organization's request to deliver humanitarian assistance to that city had been approved. On 26 March, the joint United Nations-Syrian Government team met to plan the visit. On 28 March, they were informed that approval had been granted to deliver assistance.

(b) The Syrian Government authorized the United Nations team to visit Aleppo governorate in the period 5 to 20 March 2014, in order to discuss with the competent authorities means of distributing assistance to all parts of that governorate. In the course of the visit, the Governor of Aleppo affirmed that the Syrian Government would do everything to facilitate delivery of needed assistance to all parts of the governorate. On 8 April 2014, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) delivered assistance to the eastern districts of Aleppo city.

(c) In the reporting period, delivery of assistance to the residents of Yarmouk camp in Damascus continued. The last delivery took place on 27 April 2014, when the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) distributed 480 food parcels. With that delivery, the number of food parcels distributed by UNRWA since 30 January 2014 stands at 12,285. In addition, the European Al-Wafaa Campaign distributed 2,067 food parcels in the period 31 March to 4 April 2014. To date, the total number of food parcels distributed is 14,352. Moreover, 4,177 sick persons and 189 students were evacuated.

(d) With the approval of the Syrian Government and the cooperation of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in Homs, humanitarian assistance was delivered to the following areas:

- On 8 April 2014, some 16 trucks carrying 3,000 food parcels reached Tayr Ma'lah
- On 8 April 2014, some 1,000 food parcels were delivered to Ghantu
- On 7 April 2014, some 17 trucks carrying 4,000 food parcels reached the Hulah area (Burj Qa'i, Talldaww, Kafr Laha, Tall Dahab and Tayyibah), and 500 food parcels were delivered to the Shin area (the villages of Qabw, Qanaqiyah, Umm al-'Idham and Harqal)

(e) On 12 April 2014, with the approval of the Syrian Government and the cooperation of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 16 trucks carrying food and non-food and medical items reached 20,000 civilians in Idlib governorate. The assistance was distributed in Saraqib city and the surrounding villages (Saraqib, Khan al-Subul, Mu'ardisah, Kafr Battikh, Dadikh, Jubas, Tarnabah, Mardikh, Shaykh Idris, Kafr 'Amim, Rayyan, Luf, Inqirat, Qumhanah, Lislamin, Rusafah, Burjghas, Abu al-Khaws, Shaykh Mubarak, Maharim, Tall al-Nabariz, 'Asiriyah, Khawari, Ajaz and Afas). On 27 March 2014, humanitarian assistance was delivered to Sarmada, Idlib governorate, to meet the needs of 3,500 families.

Third: Cross-border assistance

(a) On 20 March 2014, the Syrian Government approved the request of the World Food Programme (WFP) to use the Nasib border crossing with Jordan to deliver food aid from that country to its warehouses in Dar'a and Suwayda'.

(b) On 8 March 2014, the Syrian Government approved the request of WFP to use the Nusaybin/Qamishli border crossing to import 9,100 food parcels and 6,734 sacks of flour. However, those items have not yet entered Syrian territory because the Turkish Government has not given its approval.

(c) On 24 March 2014, the Syrian Government once reapproved the request of WFP to import 2,090,782 tons of food and 45,000 food parcels in the March 2014. Importation of these items into Syrian territory is pending the approval of the Turkish Government.

Fourth: Non-fulfilment by the United Nations of requests to deliver aid

(a) The towns of Nubul and Zahra', which have been besieged since mid-2012, have not yet received any humanitarian assistance, although resolution 2139 (2014) provides for that and despite the Syrian Government's requests to the United Nations in that regard. Armed elements refuse to allow humanitarian assistance to enter those towns.

(b) On 24 April 2014, the Syrian Government repeated in writing its request to the United Nations to deliver humanitarian assistance to 'Adra al-'Ummaliyah. It did so because the United Nations has delayed dispatching humanitarian convoys to that city since March. The Syrian Government is still awaiting the dispatch of those convoys. In that connection, it should be noted that the Government has offered the United Nations all necessary facilities.

Fifth: Claims that the Syrian Government is not fulfilling its obligations

The Syrian Government does not agree with the report's concluding observations that it has not fulfilled its obligations and rejects any calls based those claims, including the call on the Security Council to rectify the situation. Thanks to the efforts of the Syrian Government to facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance, in March, WFP was able to increase the number of civilians receiving food assistance to 4.1 million throughout Syria. This represents an increase of 11 per cent increase in the amount distributed, as compared to the previous period. Since the start of 2014, UNHCR has distributed non-food assistance to more than 1.5 million civilians. For example, WFP received 3,000 authorizations in the period covered by the report alone, and UNHCR was able to dispatch 327 truckloads of aid in a period of no more than a week (25 March to 1 April).

Sixth: Impreciseness of the report

(a) The Syrian Government has noted some weakness on the part of the United Nations in coordinating the distribution of humanitarian assistance. It believes that there is need for greater coordination, in order for distribution to be more effective and ensure that scarce resources are not wasted.

(b) The United Nations provides non-food aid on the basis of unified, standardized lists that may not meet the actual needs of affected persons. The Syrian Government has received a number of complaints regarding the quality of the assistance distributed by the United Nations. It therefore wishes to emphasize the necessity of reaching prior agreement on the contents of the aid packages, so as to meet the needs of the population.

(c) The Syrian Government agreed to all United Nations requests to dispatch convoys to so-called hard-to-reach areas. Four such requests were made and all of the convoys were allowed to proceed, as noted in the report. The Syrian Government is therefore not responsible for the inability of the United Nations to reach other areas to which it had not requested access in the first place and then goes on to designate them as being hard to reach. In that connection, we are surprised that the United Nations chooses to focus on certain hard-to-reach areas and not others.

(d) As noted earlier, 'Adra al-'Ummaliyah, Nubl and Zahra' have not yet received humanitarian assistance, despite the fact that the Syrian authorities have provided all facilities to the United Nations. The Organization, however, has been prevented from delivering assistance by armed terrorist groups.

(e) On 20 March 2014, the Syrian Government officially provided the office of the Resident Coordinator with the available information regarding a number of local United Nations staff members who had violated national laws and been referred to the competent judicial authorities. The Government is reviewing a new request, dated 5 March 2013, from the office of the Resident Coordinator containing a list of the names of other staff members who, according to the United Nations, had been detained or disappeared in Syria.

(f) The report fails to mention the number of the victims of the hundreds of mortar shells that rained down on Aleppo, Homs, Damascus and Rif Dimashq.

Seventh: Community associations

The Syrian Government regularly continues to expand the list of community associations operating in Syria. At the outset, the list consisted of 45 groups. That number now stands at 154 groups. The United Nations currently cooperates with 70 community associations to distribute assistance throughout Syria.

Eighth: Aleppo Central Prison

Paragraph 17 of the report contains erroneous information regarding the situation at Aleppo Central Prison, which is besieged by armed terrorist groups. The siege is so tight that food and medical supplies cannot enter. In addition, water supplies are scarce, electricity is completely cut off and supplies of diesel fuel, which is used to generate the electricity needed to feed the prisoners, have been exhausted. The situation at the prison is truly a humanitarian catastrophe. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is only able to deliver one meal per day, and even this meagre assistance has not been allowed to enter on more than one occasion. As a result of the siege imposed on the prison for approximately one year by armed terrorist groups, 528 prisoners have died, 91 of whom were killed when armed groups bombarded the prison and 437 of whom died owing to a lack of sufficient medicine and food. Some 211 prisoners have been injured and 57 prison staff members have died. Many prisoners are suffering from various diseases, including tuberculosis, and others have fainted owing to malnutrition. Syria calls for pressure to be brought to bear on the armed terrorist groups to lift their siege of the prison.

Ninth: Hospitals and Schools

The Syrian Government has informed the United Nations of the medical facilities that have been attacked or occupied by armed groups. This information

was verified by the United Nations team that visited Aleppo in April when it met with some leaders of the armed terrorist groups at 'Uyun Hospital, which those groups were using as their headquarters. The Syrian Government is surprised that, with regard to the militarization of hospitals, the report ignores this type of information, which was substantiated by the United Nations team. Following is a partial overview of the situation at educational and medical facilities:

(a) Hospitals

Some 69 hospitals have been attacked, destroyed or occupied by terrorist groups. Moreover, 711 health-care facilities and 434 ambulances have suffered the same fate. Most recently, the Tamico pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in Mulayhah, was destroyed by terrorists on 26 April 2014. In the reporting period, terrorist groups destroyed the health clinic in Kafr Takharim, Idlib, and also killed two polio vaccination campaign workers. In that connection, we should like to draw attention to the Syrian Arab Army's liberation of the hospital in Yabrud, which had been occupied by terrorists. The Syrian Government has completed half of the renovations to that hospital, which will resume operations at full capacity within one week. The Government has also earmarked 500 million Syrian pounds for renovations to Dayr Atiyah Hospital, which was looted by armed groups that had also brutally murdered a number of its staff. That hospital will resume operations in the near future. Emergency and surgery departments were established at the Dayr Atiyah health-care centre to accommodate emergency needs until the hospital resumes operations. Qalamun Hospital in Nabk is now fully operational following its renovation by the Syrian Government.

(b) Educational facilities

In the reporting period, armed groups continued to target schools across Syria, including schools in Damascus and Rif Dimashq. For example, on 1 April 2014, armed groups targeted Jawdat al-Hashimi School, injuring two students. On 15 April 2014, an armed terrorist group committed a massacre when it fired mortar shells at the Manar School in the Syrian capital, killing 2 sixth-grade students and wounding 60 others, including some who were seriously injured. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates reported the massacre to the office of the Resident Coordinator, so that it could be verified in accordance with the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The Syrian Army also succeeded in dislodging terrorists from schools in Yabrud. The Government has renovated the schools in that town and students have once more returned to full-time study there.

Meanwhile, armed groups continue to occupy civilian educational facilities at a number of Syrian universities, including the following:

Damascus University

Armed groups occupy the Technical Institute of Agricultural Studies at Kharabu in eastern Ghutah and College of Arts III in Dar'a.

Aleppo University

Terrorist groups occupy the research facility of the College of Agriculture, the Tall Balat farm, the Kaskis farm, the Sadaqah research station in Maskanah and the temporary premises of Aleppo University in Manbij.

Al-Furat University

Armed groups occupy that university's medical, veterinary medicine, petrochemical engineering, mechanical and electrical engineering, science and education faculties in Dayr al-Zawr. They also occupy the technical institute of veterinary medicine, the agricultural technologies institute, the sustainable development technologies institute and the food production technologies institute. In Raqqah, armed groups occupy the university's premises, including the faculties of pharmacy, agricultural engineering, arts and science, civil engineering and education. They also occupy the technical institute of veterinary medicine, the agricultural technologies institute and the institute of modern irrigation technologies. As regards the university's Hasakah branch, armed groups occupy the technical institute for agricultural mechanization in Qamishli.

Public Institute for Student Loans

Armed terrorist groups occupy the Institute's branches in Dayr al-Zawr and Raqqah.

Tenth: Violations of human rights and children's rights

In the reporting period, women and children continued to have their rights violated by armed terrorist groups. Terrorist groups continue to recruit children and use them to dig tunnels and carry out other logistical duties, without regard for their frailness. The Government has received documented reports of instances in which children were killed, imprisoned and tortured.

Women continue to be subjected to all forms of violence, including sexual assault, in areas that have been infiltrated by terrorists. They are forced to wear the niqab and have been whipped by so-called women's squads for failing to adhere to the dress code imposed on them. Women continue to be forced to engage in "sexual jihad" and women have been brought from abroad for that purpose in response to fatwas issued by certain Saudi sheikhs who promote factional strife.

In the Bab al-Shamal area of Aleppo, there have been 12 documented cases of young girls being subjected to female genital mutilation by unqualified persons using sharp instruments, such as razor blades. This practice constitutes a violation of the rights of the child and is not a custom or practice followed in Syria. It has been introduced into the country with the arrival of the terrorists. There are widespread acts of sexual violence against girls in areas infiltrated by terrorists. Girls are taken as captives or forcibly married to armed men without any official documentation establishing the rights of the child bride or any children resulting from such a "marriage".